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Lenin, the Anarchist?

A Constructive Misinterpretation

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Fall 2023

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revolution shown itself to be the most dangerous enemy of the proletarian dictatorship.¹⁵⁷

Or was it a dangerous friend? [End Page 816]

Author

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¹⁵⁷ Lenin, "Otchet o politicheskoi deiatel'nosti TsK RKP(b)," 8 March 1921, in *PSS*, 43:24, 32.

V. I. Lenin's "thunder-like speech" to Petrograd Bolsheviks on 3 April 1917 "startled and amazed not only me, a heretic who had accidentally dropped in, but all the true believers," remembered Nikolai Sukhanov. The idea of a government of soviets struck "every listener with any experience in political theory" as "a purely anarchist schema," as "a *totality of local authority, like the absence of any state in general, like a schema of 'free' (independent) workers' communes*." The "April Theses"—advocating a "commune state" and the abolition of the army, police, and bureaucracy—met "protests and exclamations of outrage" from Social Democrats.¹ Iosif Gol'denberg declared Lenin an "anarchist" and "the heir of [Mikhail] Bakunin."² "The pseudo-revolutionary tactics of Lenin are the natural offspring of the pseudo-revolutionary tactics of Bakunin," wrote Georgii Plekhanov in June 1917.³ In January 1918, Iulii Martov argued that Lenin "rehashed the old ideas of Bakunin." The following year, Pavel Aksel'rod called Bolshevism "a savage and pernicious throwback to Bakuninism." In 1924, Mensheviks may have placed a funeral wreath on Lenin's coffin that identified him as "the most outstanding Bakuninist among Marxists."⁴ "It is well known, I suppose," [End Page 791] mused Mark Aldanov in his 1919 Lenin biography, "that no worse insult

¹ N. N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution 1917*, ed. and trans. Joel Carmichael (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 280, 282, 283, 286.

² Quoted in David Shub, *Lenin: A Biography* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1948), 190. For another version, see Robert Service, *Lenin: A Biography* (London: Papermac, 2001), 267.

³ G. V. Plekhanov, "Nash opportiunizm," in *God na rodine*, 2 vols. (Paris: J. Povolozky, [1921]), 1:191.

⁴ Quoted in James Frank Goodwin, "Russian Anarchism and the Bolshevikization of Bakunin in the Early Soviet Period," *Kritika* 8, 3 (2007): 535, 536, which alerted me to the Plekhanov source above and partly inspired this complementary article (on the "anarchization" of Lenin).

could have been offered a Russian Social-Democrat than to call him an anarchist and compare him to Bakunin.”⁵

Anarchists described Lenin similarly, but to praise him. Anatolii Gorelik commented favorably on Lenin’s *Political Parties in Russia* (April 1917) and on *State and Revolution* (1918), “where he reveals and proves that the Bolsheviks are more anarchist than the anarchists themselves. Many other Bolsheviks expressed themselves the same way.”⁶ Vsevolod “Voline” Eikhenbaum noted “the perfect parallelism between [Lenin’s] ideas and those of the Anarchists, except the idea of the State and of Power.” Bolshevik activists used “watchwords that, until then, were precisely characteristic of anarchism,” including demands for peace, land, and workers’ control.⁷ They initially adopted “certain fundamental principles and methods of Anarchist Communism”—including direct action, antiparlamentarism, soviet democracy, and expropriation—ventured a group of Moscow anarchists in June 1921.⁸ Grigorii Maksimov went farther. “Lenin, in demanding the abolition of the army, police and officialdom impressed the workers, peasants and soldiers with the idea that a Soviet Republic is an Anarchist Federation of many thousands of Communes-Soviets scattered throughout the vast expanses of Russia, and that this Republic is a full democracy, developed to its logical end—the extinction of the State.” The Bolsheviks abandoned “orthodox Marxism” for “Anarchist slogans and methods,” Maksimov argued, and “were indeed revolutionists and Anarchists of a sort.”⁹ Upon

⁵ M.-A. Landau-Aldanov, *Lenin* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1922), 16.

⁶ A[natolii] Gorelik, *Anarkhisty v Rossiiskoi revoliutsii* ([Buenos Aires]: Izdanie Rabochei izdatel’skoi gruppy v Resp. Argentine, 1922), 8 n.

⁷ Voline [V. M. Eikhenbaum], *La révolution inconnue (1917–1921)* (Paris: n.p., [1947]), 185, 186.

⁸ Anon., *The Russian Revolution and the Communist Party* (Berlin: [Der Syndikalist], 1922), 7.

⁹ G. P. Maximoff [Maksimov], *The Guillotine at Work: Twenty Years of Terror in Russia (Data and Documents)* (Chicago: Chicago Section of the Alexander Berkman Fund, 1940), 23, 345, 346.

remarked in April 1918, was “of world-historical significance, the greatest struggle, the struggle of socialist consciousness against bourgeois-anarchist spontaneity.”¹⁵⁴ Whereas observers had suggested that popular anarchy brought the Bolsheviks to power, Lenin now insisted that Bolsheviks master their own “disorganizing, petit-bourgeois indiscipline,” which was a “million times harder than suppressing a violent landlord or [End Page 815] a violent capitalist.”¹⁵⁵ Whereas moderate socialists and anarchists once likened the Bolsheviks to “anarchists,” Lenin now applied the “anarchist” label to alleged opponents, past and present.¹⁵⁶ “This petit-bourgeois counterrevolution,” Lenin fumed during the Tenth Party Congress of March 1921, amid the suppression of the Kronstadt revolt and the defeat of the “anarcho-syndicalist deviation” and “workers’ opposition,”

is undoubtedly more dangerous than Denikin, Iudenich, and Kolchak put together.... We saw the petit-bourgeois, anarchist elements in the Russian Revolution, we have been at war with them for decades. Since February 1917, we have seen these petit-bourgeois elements in action, during the great revolution, and we saw the efforts of their petit-bourgeois parties to declare that they differed little from the Bolsheviks in their program but were only bringing it about through different means.... [This petit-bourgeois anarchist element] has more than once during the course of the

anarkhizma i sovremennost’ [Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1964], 4).

¹⁵⁴ Lenin, “Ocherednye zadachi sovetskoi vlasti,” 28 April 1918, in *PSS*, 36:184, 185.

¹⁵⁵ Lenin, “Rech’ ob obmane naroda lozungami svobody i ravenstva,” 19 May 1919, in *PSS*, 38:371.

¹⁵⁶ See, e.g., Lenin, *Detskaia bolezn’*, in *PSS*, 41:15.

to showcase “Marx’s supposed antistatist tendency”).¹⁴⁹ They largely anticipated the scholarly interpretations to come.

The role of anti-state imaginaries during the Civil War—and beyond—would be equivocal. As Richard Sakwa has argued, “Commune” ideals of unlimited local self-government and the reconciliation of “state” and “society” facilitated the profusion of unaccountable committees, the duplication of jurisdictions, and the destruction of organized political opposition in 1917–18.¹⁵⁰ Swearing fidelity to the Commune, Lenin stressed his willingness to work with anarchists, “our best comrades and friends, the best revolutionaries,” he claimed in August 1919. Their decades-long opposition to Marxism had been justified by social-democratic “opportunism” and distortion of “Marx’s revolutionary teachings in general and his teachings on the lessons of the Paris Commune of 1871 in particular”¹⁵¹—teachings subject to “straightforward suppression.”¹⁵² Of course, Lenin scorned all those anarchists who rejected proletarian dictatorship.

Yet Lenin now obsessed about “anarchism,” about which “Ilyich and I often talked,” remembered Nadezhda Krupskaya. Petit-bourgeois individualism, lack of discipline, and “anarchist moods” obstructed regime policy.¹⁵³ “The struggle to inculcate the *soviet* idea—state control and accounting,” Lenin

¹⁴⁹ Guy Aldred, “Lenin and the Anarchists,” *The Word* 24, 1 (November 1962), 7 (repr. from *The Worker*, 13 December 1919); Rudolf Rocker, *Marx y el Anarquismo* (n.l.: n.p., [c. 1958; orig. pub. 1925]), 11, 12.

¹⁵⁰ Richard Sakwa, “The Commune State in Moscow in 1918,” *Slavic Review* 46, 3–4 (1987): 429–49.

¹⁵¹ Lenin, “Pis’mo Sil’vii Pankherst [Sylvia Pankhurst],” 28 August 1919, in *PSS*, 39:161.

¹⁵² Lenin, *Detskaia bolezn’ levizny v kommunizme*, June 1920, in *PSS*, 41:17.

¹⁵³ N. K. Krupskaya, *Reminiscences of Lenin* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959), 503, 505. Nor was this just during the Civil War: “The struggle against anarchist views, which circulate even in our Soviet society, is one of the most important tasks of the party and of the whole Soviet people” (A. D. Kosichev, *Bor’ba marksizma-leninizma s ideologiei*

Lenin’s death, Apollon Karelin and other secretaries of the All-Russian Anarcho-Communist Federation eulogized a “great revolutionary.”¹⁰ The Bolsheviks, Karelin had argued in December 1918, were “in a sense preparing the way for anarchism.”¹¹ [End Page 792]

If historians have long known that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were briefly seen as anarchists, few have explored how or why this mattered—if it did. Though anarchists were responsible for most of the estimated 17,000 casualties of terrorism in the Russian Empire in 1901–16, they hardly possessed a coherent movement or much ideological salience.¹² Of course, Lenin and top Bolsheviks never tired of saying that they were *not* anarchists. Anarchism meant petit-bourgeois individualism, “in direct opposition to socialism,” Lenin wrote in November 1905.¹³ Lars T. Lih’s bracing reinterpretation of Lenin downplays insurrectionism, visions of soviet democracy, and *State and Revolution*, a text “irrelevant to the events of the previous year.” The tactics advocated by Karl Kautsky before 1914—namely, a worker-peasant alliance in Russia and nonagreement with “bourgeois” parties—“led to [the Bolsheviks’] victory in Octo-

¹⁰ Quoted in Dmitrii Rublev, “Anarkhisty o politicheskoi deiatel’nosti V. I. Lenina v epokhu Velikoi rossiiskoi revoliutsii,” *Rossiiskaia istoriia*, no. 2 (2020): 69.

¹¹ “Pervyi Vserossiiskii s’ezd anarkhistov-kommunistov (protokoly),” 25–28 December 1918, in *Anarkhisty: Dokumenty i materialy, 1883–1935 gg.*, ed. V. V. Kriven’ki, 2 vols. (Moscow: Rosspen, 1998–99), 2:175.

¹² For the casualties claim, see Anna Geifman, *Thou Shalt Kill: Revolutionary Terrorism in Russia, 1894–1917* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 124–25. Accounts recovering “Russian anarchism” but admitting its heterogeneity and modest impact include Voline, *Révolution*; Paul Avrich, *The Russian Anarchists* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1967); and Michael Confino, “Organization as Ideology: Dilemmas of the Russian Anarchists (1903–1914),” *Russian History* 37, 3 (2010): 179–207.

¹³ V. I. Lenin, “Sotsializm i anarkhizm,” 25 November 1905, in his *Polnoe sobranie sochinenii* (hereafter *PSS*), 5th ed., 55 vols. (Moscow: Institut Marksizma-Leninizma, 1958–65), 12:131.

ber and the ensuing civil war.”¹⁴ For Lih, the late Lenin was “a European Social Democrat of Russian origin” (a portrait rejected by many European social democrats). That “Lenin advanced the semi-anarchist slogan of ‘smash the state!’” in 1917 is “a common misunderstanding” and “distortion.”¹⁵ Why was it common? How might it have been consequential or illuminating?

This article reconstructs a European socialist discourse in which Lenin’s propositions of 1917 seemed anarchist. It emphasizes his idiosyncratic emphasis on the Paris Commune, which barely appears in Kautsky’s *The Erfurt Program* (1892) or *The Road to Power* (1909), or Lih’s work.¹⁶ It draws on a variety of viewpoints—foreign journalism, Bolshevik and Menshevik accounts, anarchist newspapers and memoirs—to hypothesize that Lenin’s “Commune” and “antistate” idiom was perhaps instrumental to [End Page 793] Bolshevik success in 1917 and beyond. It also proposes that contemplating the mirage of an “anarchist Lenin” can clarify a puzzle in the history of the Russian and European Left. Specialists have long wondered whether *State and Revolution* was an earnest “libertarian” tract or an “authoritarian” subterfuge, just as they have debated why the October Revolution turned out as it did.¹⁷ For their part, scholars of Russian anarchism have tended to portray

¹⁴ Lars T. Lih, “Karl Kautsky as Architect of the October Revolution,” *Jacobin*, 29 June 2019, <https://jacobinmag.com/2019/06/karl-kautsky-vladimir-lenin-russian-revolution>.

¹⁵ Lars T. Lih, *Lenin* (London: Reaktion Books, 2011), 124, 136. Lih has also argued that the “Theses” were not a radical novelty among Bolsheviks, who quickly accepted them in principle (Lih, “A Fully Armed Historiography,” *Canadian-American Slavic Studies* 53, 1–2 [2019]: 72–89).

¹⁶ Victor Sebestyen, *Lenin: The Man, the Dictator, and the Master of Terror* (New York: Pantheon, 2017), 89, 166, actually miscalculates the Commune.

¹⁷ “Lenin displayed both overtly libertarian and overtly authoritarian facets in his thinking,” wrote Robert Service, who deemed *State and Revolution* “a hotch-potch.” Service did not explore older meanings of “libertarian” and “authoritarian” (V. I. Lenin, *The State and Revolution*, ed. Service [London: Penguin, 1992], xxix, xxx).

bring undistorted Marxism to the consciousness of the broad masses.”¹⁴⁵

In reclaiming the Commune for Marxism, Lenin did not only challenge social democrats (his preferred sparring partners) but acknowledged that the anarchists “tried to claim precisely the Paris Commune as, so to speak, ‘their own,’ as a corroboration of their doctrines.” He emphasized Engels’s 1875 letter to Bebel, with its suggestion to drop “state” for *Gemeinwesen* (“what a cry would be raised by today’s leaders of ‘Marxism’...!”) and its insistence that the state would eventually disappear. The letter, which “lay hidden for 36 years,” contained “one of the most remarkable, if not the most remarkable, judgments concerning the state in the works of Marx and Engels.” According to Lenin, 9,990 of 10,000 people familiar with the concept of the “withering away” of the state did not know or understand its true meaning.¹⁴⁶ When Kautsky took him to task, Lenin (convalescing after the attentat of 30 August 1918) stayed up late to dictate his retort, “literally burning with anger,” as Bonch-Bruевич recalled.¹⁴⁷ The “renegade” Kautsky and the Mensheviks had turned Marx into “a common liberal” and misrepresented the Commune. “We know the example of the Commune, we know all the judgments made by the founders of Marxism in connection with it and about it.”¹⁴⁸ For their part, anarchists would debate whether *State and Revolution* was an earnest [End Page 814] Marxist text that transcended existing interpretations (“showing the revolutionary oneness of all that is essential in Marx with all that counts in Bakunin”) or a dubious self-justification (intended

¹⁴⁵ Lenin, *Gosudarstvo i revoliutsiia*, in *PSS*, 33:6, 55.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 104, 65, 66, 64.

¹⁴⁷ Quoted in Lenin, *PSS*, 37:589 n. 95.

¹⁴⁸ Lenin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia*, in *PSS*, 37:250, 265.

and at the same time to liberate themselves from any state machine.” In other words, the Bolshevik regime “could only be consolidated by clothing itself in this anarcho-antistatist [*anarkho-protivogosudarstvennaia*] ideology.”¹⁴⁰ It did so amid unique circumstances. After decades of social-democratic dominance, world war resurrected the incoherent “communalist ideology.” The masses again aspired to create “autonomous and freely federated urban communes.” Yet their communes’ narrow social base and inflated self-image “easily incline them to the idea of the dictatorship of these very centers over the whole country,” Martov reflected.¹⁴¹ **[End Page 813]**

In *State and Revolution*, Lenin passionately, idiosyncratically fused together many ideas that socialists had kept separate. Among Russian revolutionaries who visited Paris in the 1900s, Lenin had been “virtually alone” in insisting on the Commune’s positive lessons.¹⁴² Writing his biography of Marx in July–November 1914, he observed that Marx “so profoundly, accurately, brilliantly, and *effectively* revolutionarily evaluated” the Commune in *The Civil War* and could not be understood “without considering *all* the works of Engels.”¹⁴³ Before the February Revolution, he gathered notes, quotations, and citations in his blue notebook, “Marxism on the State.” During the July Days, he asked Lev Kamenev to publish it “if they bump me off.... I consider it important, for not only Plekhanov but Kautsky got it wrong.”¹⁴⁴ The task in *State and Revolution*, written that summer, consisted “above all in the *restoration* of the true teachings of Marx on the state,” for “now it is actually necessary to carry out excavations in order to

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 92.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 109–10 n. 6. Here Fedor Dan quoted from a passage from Martov’s manuscripts.

¹⁴² Harison, “Paris Commune,” 24.

¹⁴³ Lenin, “Karl Marks,” in *PSS*, 26:49, 93.

¹⁴⁴ Lenin to L. B. Kamenev, written between 5 and 7 July 1917, in *PSS*, 49:444.

rebels, victims, and martyrs.¹⁸ But if one historicizes the meanings of “libertarian” and “authoritarian” and treats anarchists as agents who shaped Soviet power and found themselves “striving vainly against the formidable machine which they themselves had helped to create,” as Emma Goldman wrote, a new perspective emerges.¹⁹ Communism can be understood, in part, as antistatist not merely in its aspirations but in its norms and practices. This paradoxical interpretation may help to explain communism’s capacious political appeal and institutional vicissitudes in modern times.

Insurrectionary Antecedents

The Paris Commune was not the first insurgent commune declared in France during the Franco-Prussian War of 1870–71. For years, Mikhail Bakunin and his International Alliance of Socialist Democracy had promoted ideals of “federalist” socialism (based on collective ownership by federations of unions and municipalities) and organized sections of the International Working Men’s Association across Europe. When the Second Empire fell on 4 September 1870, Bakunin advocated that all communes arm and organize themselves “from the bottom up,” proclaim “the overthrow of the State along with all its

¹⁸ The opening of archives has produced few interpretations different from those of Paul Avrich in the 1960s and 1970s. Valerii Kriven’kii described his two-volume anthology of archival documents and newspaper sources as a bid “to fill yet another ‘gap’ in the history of Russian political parties” (*Anarkhisty*, 1:7). See also Kriven’kii, “Anarkhisty” and “Anarkhisty ischezaiut,” in *Politicheskie partii Rossii: Istoriia i sovremennost’*, ed. A. I. Zevelev, Iu. P. Sviridenko, and V. V. Shelokhaev (Moscow: Rosspen, 2000), 210–26, 381–86. Widespread anarchist participation in the regime is “not well known” (Martin Miller, “Anarchists in the State: New Perspectives on Russian Anarchist Participation in the Bolshevik Government, 1917–1919,” *Anarchist Studies* 20, 2 [2012]: 49).

¹⁹ Emma Goldman, *My Further Disillusionment in Russia* (New York: Doubleday, Page, 1924), 85.

institutions and the abolition of all existing laws,” and prepare a revolutionary war “against the Prussians [End Page 794] from without, against the traitors from within.”²⁰ On the 26th, Bakunin and his associates told an enthusiastic crowd in Lyons that the revolution had begun. Troops arrived two days later and put the revolutionaries to flight.²¹ When the Commune erupted the following March, Bakunin and his friends tended to see it as a heroic, if doomed, confirmation of their own ideas. Militants tried to install revolutionary communes in Lyons (again) later in March and in April 1871, Alcoy in July 1873, Bologna in August 1874 (with Bakunin’s participation), and the Matese Mountains in Campania in April 1877.²²

Throughout the 1870s, Karl Marx, and even more so Friedrich Engels, ridiculed the “Bakuninists.” But Marx had equivocated about the Commune. The brash first draft of *The Civil War in France* (1871) praised “a Revolution against the State itself,” described “all France organised into selfworking and selfgoverning communes,” and regretted the failure of insurrectionism. Had Auguste Blanqui’s own coup attempt of 31 October 1[870] succeeded and the Commune been created at that date, revolutionary war would have “electrified the producing masses in the old and the new world.”²³ Marx’s final

²⁰ Mikhail Bakunin to Albert Richard, 4 September 1870, 2, in Bakunin, *Oeuvres complètes* (Amsterdam: Edita-KNAW, 2000). See also [Bakunin], *Lettres à un français sur la crise actuelle* (N.L.: n.p., 1870).

²¹ James Guillaume, *L’Internationale: Documents et souvenirs*, 4 vols. (Paris: Société nouvelle de librairie et d’éditions and P.-V. Stock, 1905–10), 2:93–99; Julian P. W. Archer, *The First International in France, 1864–1872: Its Origins, Theories, and Impact* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1997), 266–69.

²² Archer, *First International*, 270–72; George Richard Esenwein, *Anarchist Ideology and the Working-Class Movement in Spain, 1868–1898* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 46–47; Nunzio Pernicone, *Italian Anarchism, 1864–1892* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 91–93, 122–28.

²³ Karl Marx, “The First Draft [of *The Civil War in France*],” in Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, ed. Hal Draper (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 150, 154, 145.

Lenin perpetrated “a deliberate lie, the greatest deliberate fraud and unprecedented deceit practiced upon the people,” Maksimov wrote. He used [End Page 812] “ideas of Federalist Communism and genuine Libertarian Socialism” as a ruse and the Commune idea “as a bait, as a means to gain the sympathies of the workers and peasants, as a weapon clearing the road to power.”¹³⁶ For Petr Arshinov, the Bolsheviks “took up [the revolutionary masses’] extremist, frequently anarchist, slogans,” such as land and workers’ control, but made an “about-face” once they seized power, with “pure imposture and usurpation.”¹³⁷ For Gorelik, the Bolsheviks “came to power by means of anarchist slogans,” swaying “the majority of anarchists” with “demagoguery.”¹³⁸

Perhaps Martov’s interpretation, appearing in the posthumous 1923 edition of *World Bolshevism*, was the most subtle. The uniqueness of Lenin’s politics stemmed precisely from their source in Marx’s ambiguous interpretation of the Commune: a state and not a state, a “political” form to realize the emancipation of labor and a “social” form already characterized by freely associated laborers under radical-democratic conditions. Marx’s account, recognized as “Proudhonist” by Bernstein but not critiqued by Plekhanov and Kautsky, lent itself to an “anarcho-syndicalist schema” whereby the state would be simultaneously destroyed and reconstituted.¹³⁹ Whether understood as such by Lenin, this idea was “objectively ... necessary” in order to frame the experience of building a new dictatorial regime as “the beginning of a stateless society based on a minimum of compulsion and discipline.” The idea was likewise needed to reconcile the “contradictory aspiration of the revolutionary popular elements to suppress the exploiting classes in their interests,

¹³⁶ Maximoff, *Guillotine*, 25, 33, 34.

¹³⁷ Arshinov, *History*, 41.

¹³⁸ Gorelik, *Anarkhisty*, 14, 16.

¹³⁹ Iu. O. Martov, *Mirovoi bol’shevizm* (Berlin: Iskra, 1923), 89.

A related paradox is the notion that Bolshevik success in October and beyond depended on indulging purportedly anarchist practices and Commune ideas. Communists stressed that the party served as a “lightning rod” amid a “premature popular storm” characterized by “crude anarchist actions and all sorts of arbitrary excesses” (Bonch-Bruevich) and emphasized the decisive role of Lenin’s Commune concept (Anzhelika Balabanova).¹³² The premier Soviet authority on Bakunin (once a critic of Lenin) Iu. M. Steklov recast Bakunin, “alongside Marx, as one of the forerunners of modern communism and in particular of the October Revolution” precisely because of the Lyons bid. Despite its “specifically anarchist outward form,” which was “by no means inseparable connected to the plan itself such as it was,” Bakunin’s strategy to use the defeat of France to instigate revolutionary war was the best available and had basically been implemented by the Communards themselves.¹³³ For Steklov, any successful workers’ revolution “will inevitably have to employ communist methods, even if it began with anarchy.”¹³⁴

Opponents of the regime made similar arguments, though in accusatory tones. For Sukhanov, Lenin’s “abstractions” enabled him “to conquer not only the revolution, not only all its active masses, not only the whole Soviet—but even his own Bolsheviks.” The party swept to power by exploiting “an unbridled, anarchistic, petty-bourgeois elemental explosion.”¹³⁵

¹³² Bonch-Bruevich, *Sochineniia*, 3:58; Angelica Balabanoff [Anzhelika Balabanova], *My Life as a Rebel* (New York: Greenwood, 1968), 143–44.

¹³³ Iu. Steklov, *Mikhail Aleksandrovich Bakunin, ego zhizh' i deiatel'nost' (1814–1976)*, 4 vols. (Moscow and Leningrad: I. D. Sytin and Gosudarstvennoe izdatel'stvo, 1920–27), 4:48.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 4:67. Later, this interpretation was qualified. “Yes, the Commune was the negation of the state, but of the bourgeois state. The revolution of 18 March 1871 created a new type of state—the dictatorship of the proletariat. The anarchist Bakunin could not understand this” (B. S. Itenberg, *Rossia i Parizhskaia kommuna* [Moscow: Nauka, 1971], 150).

¹³⁵ Sukhanov, *Revolution*, 289, 530.

draft omitted Blanqui and stressed foreclosed possibilities: the Commune *was* to permit the abolition of class rule and emancipate labor, *would* have restored society’s powers to itself, and *intended* to institute “communism.” The political analysis was obscure. Marx honored a “working men’s government” that was neither an instrument of class rule per se nor an alien power above society, but a form of expansive social self-governance tasked with working out its own contradictions.²⁴ This interpretation bewildered Bakunin, who had saluted the Commune as “a bold and striking negation of the State” in June [End Page 795] 1871.²⁵ Marx and his German comrades, “all of whose ideas [and idols] had been overthrown by this insurrection,” claimed the Commune as their own despite “the simplest logic and their true sentiments,” Bakunin asserted. They committed this “truly farcical travesty” given the passionate influence of circumstances and their desire to avoid being “outflanked and abandoned by all.”²⁶

How to interpret the Commune was a major, though not the sole, way that European “anarchists” and “Marxists” (at first, little more than abusive labels for similar groups of socialists) distinguished themselves from the mid- to late 1870s onward. Anarchists, often calling themselves anarchist or “libertarian” communists, tended to treat the specific Commune and the generic commune (including the Russian *mir*) as their lodestar, even as they documented its inadequacies and debated tactics (insurrection, attentat, propaganda, trade-union organization). Thus Petr Kropotkin cast “the free Commune,” as advocated by the Parisians, to be “an essentially

²⁴ Marx, *Civil War in France*, in *Writings*, 80.

²⁵ Mikhail Bakunin, “L’Empire knouto-germanique et la révolution sociale: Préambule pour la seconde livraison,” 5–23 June 1871, 6, in *OEuvres*. This text became the basis of *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*.

²⁶ Mikhail Bakunin, “Lettre au journal ‘La Liberté’ de Bruxelles,” 1–8 October 1872, 33 (Bakunin’s brackets), in *OEuvres*.

Anarchist principle” in 1881.²⁷ “Judging by what was said” at the commemoration meetings in France that year, workers would (during the next revolution) organize independent localities, expropriate property, and introduce “anarchist communism.”²⁸ “There is to be the *commune*, which, in its subsequent development, will arise from the present *rural commune*,” wrote Plekhanov in the mid-1890s, commenting on Bakunin’s program. “It was above all the Bakuninists who in Russia spread the biased view of the marvelous qualities of the Russian rural commune.”²⁹

By contrast, social democrats honored the Commune in ritual but rarely believed that it should be imitated. From the late 1870s, “German social democracy embarked upon a veritable offensive against the Commune,” comparing it to “a Blanquist or anarchist sortie,” as Georges Haupt observed.³⁰ An old-fashioned minority revolt, the Commune lacked “the strong organization of the proletariat as a class and the fundamental [End Page 796] clarity of its world-historical vocation,” reflected Franz Mehring in 1896.³¹ It was “ancient history,” wrote Plekhanov.³² French socialists including Jean Jaurès, Jules Guesde, and even syndicalists all doubted that the Commune should be repeated.³³ Attendees of Second International congresses invoked the Commune rarely, vir-

²⁷ [Petr Kropotkin], “La Commune de Paris,” *Le Révolté* 3, 2 (18 March 1881): 1.

²⁸ [Petr Kropotkin], “L’Anniversaire du 18 Mars,” *Le Révolté* 4, 3 (1 April 1882): 1.

²⁹ Georges Plékhanoff [Georgii Plekhanov], *Anarchisme et socialisme* (Paris: Publications du groupe des étudiants collectivistes, 1896–97), 39 n.

³⁰ Georges Haupt, *Aspects of International Socialism, 1871–1914*, trans. Peter Fawcett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 41, 43.

³¹ [Franz Mehring], “Zum Gedächtnis der Pariser Kommune,” *Die Neue Zeit* 14, 24 (1895–96): 739, 740.

³² Quoted in Haupt, *Aspects*, 43.

³³ Casey Harison, “The Paris Commune of 1871, the Russian Revolution of 1905, and the Shifting of the Revolutionary Tradition,” *History and Memory* 19, 2 (2007): 5–42.

the mid-1800s onward and deemed the former an ideal immanent among the masses—“*the only truly revolutionary workers’ ideology*.”¹²⁸ For Goldman, the Russian Revolution “had been *à la Bakunin*”—popular, bottom-up—before it was “transformed *à la Karl Marx*” by top-down imposition.¹²⁹ Once frenemies whose norms and practices seemed difficult to distinguish, anarchists and Bolsheviks now represented diametrical traditions and ways of political life.

Such narratives concealed as much as they revealed. For Lenin and for many anarchists, freedom was inconceivable so long as the “state” continued to exist. Both demanded forms of plebeian (not universal) democracy and the suppression of “bourgeois” opposition via indefinite violence, or, in Lenin’s phrase, a form of rule “relying directly upon force, unrestricted by any laws.”¹³⁰ Both advocated a dictatorial (extralegal) polity dedicated to widespread expropriation and socialization, the abolition of “bourgeois” institutions, and the realization of stateless communism. Both equated this polity with the “people,” not with a power above them. “The state is us, it’s the proletariat, it’s the vanguard of the working class,” Lenin argued [End Page 811] in March 1922.¹³¹ “Libertarian” and “authoritarian” described socialist politics with substantive similarities, despite key differences and very distinct expressions. Every anarchist effort to formalize “libertarian” politics, from Bakunin’s infamous Alliance to the Makhnovists’ “Organizational Platform” of 1926, was denounced by other anarchists as “authoritarian.” It can be argued that Lenin and the Bolsheviks betrayed antistatist ideals by institutionalizing them.

¹²⁸ Arshinov, *History*, 22.

¹²⁹ Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2:826.

¹³⁰ Lenin, *Proletarskaia revoliutsiia i renegat Kautskii* (1918), in PSS, 37:245.

¹³¹ Lenin, “Politicheskii otchet Tsentral’nogo komiteta RKP(b),” 27 March 1922, in PSS, 45:85.

imate (anti-Soviet) anarchists and legitimate (“ideological,” *ideinye*) anarchists.¹²⁴ Others petitioned the authorities for civil rights.¹²⁵ By April 1920, it seemed to Alexander Berkman (writing in his unpublished diary) [End Page 810] that all revolutionaries critical of the regime were ultimately driven “into the camp of the Communist party.”¹²⁶

From Anarchy to Statism?

The attempts to define Lenin and the Bolsheviks as “anarchists,” documented above, may elicit a knowing smile from today’s scholars. Yet “anarcho-Bolshevism” was a salient mirage for a novel and obscure politics that seemed to span antistatism and statism during an unprecedented era of total war, imperial collapse, and millenarian expectation. The mirage was partly dispelled by the events of the Civil War and by new information. But it was also replaced by a new myth that reasserted the old dichotomies of socialist thought. Soviet writers faulted anarchism as a “petit-bourgeois” politics always inimical to Marxism and “as a mood, as a condition of certain mass strata, as an elemental force [*stikhii*] that has seized them.”¹²⁷ In complementary fashion, anarchists imagined an epochal struggle of “libertarian” socialism against “authoritarian” socialism from

¹²⁴ See, e.g., “Vystuplenie A. Iu. Ge na dnevnom zasedanii VTsIK,” 15 April 1918, in Kriven’ki, *Anarkhisty*, 2:235–36.

¹²⁵ For example, Moscow anarchists in March 1920 requested that anarchist groups be granted the “right to legal political existence, to freedom of speech, of the press, and so forth throughout the entire territory of Soviet Russia” (Gosudarstvennyi arkhiv Rossiiskoi Federatsii [GARF] f. 8403, op. 1, d. 6, l. 12 [Moscow Anarchist Conference petition to TsK RKP(b), n.d.]). See Enna Goldman, *Living My Life*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1931), 2:755.

¹²⁶ Alexander Berkman, “Russian Diary,” 33, in Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis, Alexander Berkman Papers, n. 2.

¹²⁷ S. N. Kanev, *Oktiabr’skaia revoliutsiia i krakh anarkhizma* (Moscow: Mysl’, 1974), 5. See E. Yaroslavsky, *History of Anarchism in Russia* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1938).

tually always to honor its participants or as a cheer (*vive la Commune!*).

To be sure, the Social-Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) in its Erfurt Program (1891) endorsed the radical-democratic institutions ascribed to the Commune in *The Civil War* (an elected civil service and judiciary, a popular militia, free and secular schools).³⁴ But the Commune was mentioned only in passing in Karl Kautsky’s widely read 1892 exegesis.³⁵ The following year, Kautsky averred that the SPD was “a revolutionary, but not a revolution-making, party,” which under no circumstances should “instigate” or “prepare” a revolution.³⁶ The problem was that finding the “right balance” was “very difficult” to achieve.³⁷ Too much moderation fostered anarchism, born of “lack of insight and hopelessness.”³⁸ In 1905, Kautsky quoted *The Civil War* approvingly to indicate that the Commune represented “the ideal of the democratic republic” and a form of expansive “self-government.”³⁹ But that same year, he diminished the Commune as “only a revolution in one city [that] was defeated in a few weeks.”⁴⁰ *The Road to Power* (1909) simply called it “the last great defeat of the proletariat.” The major setbacks suffered by the labor movement since 1871 were all the result of anarchist-type tactics: village revolts in Spain in 1873, attentats in Germany in 1878 and in Austria in

³⁴ See Karl Kautsky, *Karl Kautsky on Democracy and Republicanism*, ed. and trans. Ben Lewis (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 307–28.

³⁵ Karl Kautsky, *Das Erfurter Programm in seinem grundsätzlichen Theil*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: J. H. W. Dietz, 1892), 250.

³⁶ Karl Kautsky, “Ein sozialdemokratische Katechismus,” *Die Neue Zeit*, 13 December 1893, 368.

³⁷ Karl Kautsky, “Ein sozialdemokratische Katechismus,” *Die Neue Zeit*, 20 December 1893, 410.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 408.

³⁹ Kautsky, *Democracy*, 199, 243. See also 197–99.

⁴⁰ Quoted in Harison, “Paris Commune,” 22 (Harison’s brackets).

1884, the Haymarket bombing in Chicago in 1886.⁴¹ Unwise compromises (namely, Millerandism) [End Page 797] encouraged syndicalism, “the latest variety of anarchism,” both of which attempted “to provoke untimely tests of strength.”⁴²

In what sense Marx or “Marxism” counseled a revolt against the “state” as such was debatable. Marx’s private judgment about the Commune—“this was merely an uprising of one city in exceptional circumstances,” he admitted in 1881—was published only in 1928.⁴³ In a March 1875 letter to August Bebel, published in 1911, Engels explained that the state was merely a transitional weapon in the class struggle, fated to disappear. The idea of a *Volkstaat* (people’s state), “flung in our teeth *ad nauseam* by the anarchists,” was self-contradictory. Socialists should replace “state” with *Gemeinwesen*, “a good old German word that can very well do service for the French ‘Commune.’”⁴⁴ The era’s popular social-democratic texts, namely Engels’s *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific* (1880) and Bebel’s *Socialism and Woman* (as revised in 1883), described a tantalizing *no-state* future in which political institutions had disappeared after a hazy process of historical evolution, replaced by “administration.”⁴⁵ For Engels, the Commune represented “the Dictatorship of the

⁴¹ Karl Kautsky, *Der Weg zur Macht: Politische Betrachtungen über das Hineinwachsen in die Revolution* (Berlin: Buchhandlung Vorwärts, 1909), 48.

⁴² Kautsky, *Weg zur Macht*, 52.

⁴³ Karl Marx to Ferdinand Domela Nieuwenhuis, 22 February 1881, in Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Works*, 50 vols. (New York: International Publishers, 1975–2004), 46:66.

⁴⁴ Friedrich Engels to August Bebel, 18–28 March 1875, in *Collected Works*, 24:71.

⁴⁵ Vernon L. Lidtke, “German Socialism and Social Democracy 1860–1900,” in *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 789–93.

part in expropriations, extortions, and killings. The crackdown of 11–12 April seems to have taken them by surprise.¹²⁰

Usually from this date onward, historians describe anarchists as inveterate opponents and disillusioned critics of the regime. This credible narrative downplays the dilemmas that anarchists faced as true-believing revolutionaries in the struggle between “revolution” and “counterrevolution.” To move against the Bolsheviks meant “playing into the hands of the counterrevolutionaries,” argued Karelin on 26 December 1918.¹²¹ Accordingly, many made compromises with the regime, even as they opposed it. The stillborn Black Guard was supposed to liaise with the Red Army and Soviet government.¹²² In eastern Ukraine, the peasant rebel Nestor Makhno sought autonomy within Soviet territory more than the regime’s overthrow. He relied on regime-supplied rifles, munitions, and funds, executed White envoys, and cut deals with Moscow (which the latter violated).¹²³ Some anarchists accepted the regime’s distinction between illegit-

¹²⁰ Maksimoff, *Guillotine*, 356. See also Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:229–30, 232–35. Geoffrey Swain (“The Bolshevik Anti-Anarchist Action of Spring 1918,” *Revolutionary Russia* 33, 2 [2020]: 221–45) takes seriously the regime view that declarations about the Black Guard in March and April 1918 could have constituted a “conspiracy” to jeopardize Brest-Litovsk and thus something “counter-revolutionary to the Bolsheviks.” Perhaps the crackdown was intended to reassure the incoming German ambassador, Wilhelm von Mirbach (Swain, “Bolshevik Anti-Anarchist Action,” 239). Another hypothesis is that the raid was partly motivated by the complaints of the American Red Cross officer Raymond Robins, whose car anarchists stole. According to Robins’s recollections, the government wanted to wait until local soviet elections had concluded before cracking down. See William Hard, *Raymond Robins’ Own Story* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers [1920]), 76–81.

¹²¹ “Pervyi Vserossiiskii s’ezd,” in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:173.

¹²² [Aleksandr], “Chernaia gvardiia,” 10 March 1918, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:216–18.

¹²³ For background, see Peter Arshinov, *History of the Makhnovist Movement, 1918–1921*, trans. Lorraine and Fredy Perlman (Detroit: Black and Red, 1974); Voline, *Révolution*; and Aleksandr Shubin, *Makhno i makhnovskoe dvizhenie* (Moscow: MIK, 1998).

or fast enough. On the one hand, according to newspaper articles of November 1917, Lenin was an “anarchist-statist [anarkhist-gosudarstvennik]” whose party desired to preserve the “capitalist system” and the “vestiges of lawful parliamentary activity.”¹¹⁶ On the other hand, the masses, “even where they show insufficient consciousness, are anarchists in spirit,” claimed Aleksandr Ge on 13 December at a meeting of the Petrograd Federation of Anarchists. Reports from outlying districts “clearly proved that everywhere, without any doubt, one finds the strong influence of anarchists, which is developing and growing every day.”¹¹⁷ “We find ourselves, after a Bolshevik revolution,” observed a writer in *L’Intransigent*, “on the eve of an anarchist revolution.”¹¹⁸ In the final days of 1917, Lenin jotted down bullet points that suggested the need to correct the “anarchism” of Bolsheviks. “Propaganda by the deed,” “Our attitude to the anarchists,” “Anarchists on account of misunderstanding—of impatience, of mood, of instinct.”¹¹⁹ After the fierce debates of early 1918 and its move to Moscow in March, the government found opportunity and reason to settle scores. Local anarchists occupied around two dozen mansions, circulated wishful plans to form an anti-German partisan force (the Black Guard), and (as the local organ *Anarkhiia* admitted and even regretted) [End Page 809] took

¹¹⁶ Gordiny, “K osvobozhdeniiu,” 11 November [1917], in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:70; “Sovremennyi moment i zadachi anarkhistov,” 21 November 1917, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:74.

¹¹⁷ Paraphrased in K. Serdiukova, “Obshchee sobranie Federatsii,” 13 December 1917, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:93, 94.

¹¹⁸ Stéphane Aubac, “Les allemands veulent aller à Pétrograd pour y conquérir la Constituante!,” *L’Intransigent*, 11 December 1917, 1.

¹¹⁹ Lenin, “Iz dnevnika publitsista,” written 21–24 December 1917 (6–9 January 1918), in *PSS*, 35:187. For rebuttals of accusations of anarchism, see, e.g., Lenin, “Zakliuchitel’noe slovo po agrarnomu voprosu,” 18 November (1 December) 1918, in *PSS*, 35:100; and Lenin, “Rech’ na Pervom Vserossiiskom s’ezde voennogo flota,” 22 November (5 December) 1917, in *PSS*, 35:113.

Proletariat,” as he declared in 1891.⁴⁶ But Marx appears never to have used the term in reference to the Commune,⁴⁷ and the SPD’s parliamentary delegation repudiated the phrase in the Reichstag when Engels published *The Critique of the Gotha Program* without the party executive’s permission.⁴⁸

For a range of writers, *The Civil War* was simply a heterodox work. In 1899, Eduard Bernstein pointed out that the Commune’s program, as described and vindicated by *The Civil War*, “displays, in all material respects, the greatest similarity to the federalism of—Proudhon!”⁴⁹ In his memoirs of [End Page 798] 1905–10, James Guillaume, Bakunin’s Swiss associate, called *The Civil War* an “astonishing declaration of principles” in which Marx appeared “to have abandoned his own program in order to rally to federalist ideas.” Guillaume quoted Marx at length, highlighting phrases about the state, and wondered whether Marx underwent “a genuine conversion.”⁵⁰ In his 1918 biography of Marx, Mehring attempted to explain “the contradiction” between *The Communist Manifesto*’s insistence on the revolutionary use of state power and *The Civil War*’s praise of this power’s negation. The *Manifesto*’s June 1872 preface, which included *The Civil War*’s caveat that “the working class cannot simply lay hold of the ready-made State machinery, and wield it for

⁴⁶ Friedrich Engels, “Introduction to Marx, *The Civil War in France*,” in Karl Marx and Engels, *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 629.

⁴⁷ For discussion, see Chimen Abramsky, “Marx’s Theory of the State: From the *Communist Manifesto* to the *Civil War in France*,” in *Images of the Commune*, ed. James A. Leith (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1978), 21–32.

⁴⁸ Carl Landauer, *European Socialism: A History of Ideas and Movements from the Industrial Revolution to Hitler’s Seizure of Power*, 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1959), 1:297.

⁴⁹ Eduard Bernstein, *The Preconditions of Socialism*, ed. and trans. Henry Tudor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 153.

⁵⁰ Guillaume, *L’Internationale*, 2:191–92.

its own purposes,” was for Mehring an untenable revision produced under the Commune’s “immediate influence.” The idea that an insurrection successfully destroyed the French state seemed “a confirmation of Bakunin’s steadfastly maintained standpoint.”⁵¹

If on the eve of World War I “the main division in the workers’ movement was the division into socialists and anarchists,” as Lenin recalled, most Europeans would have agreed that the latter, not the former, were (as in Eric Hobsbawm’s judgment) “the characteristic form of the revolutionary left.”⁵² Whereas anarchists tended to revile compromise with existing institutions, call for immediate revolution, and participate in or justify the assassinations that shocked the fin-de-siècle world, socialists looked relatively moderate, even mainstream to publics as well as to radical activists. The “international Socialists” feared by ordinary Europeans were represented not by law-abiding social democrats but by “the Anarchist with the smoking bomb in his pocket,” as the historian James Joll wrote.⁵³ Prewar socialism “meant reformism, parliamentarism, and repellent doctrinal rigidity,” claimed Victor Serge (V. L. Kibal’chich), who grew up in Belgium and France. Even syndicalism promised “a future Statism, as terrible as any other.” Serge and his friends gravitated toward “a passionate, pure Socialism,” “a Socialism of battle.” This they found in anarchism, with its rejection of the status quo and its exco-

⁵¹ Franz Mehring, *Karl Marx: The Story of His Life*, trans. Edward Fitzgerald (New York: Covici, Friede, 1935), 478. For the *Manifesto* preface (quoting *The Civil War*), see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, ed. Gareth Stedman Jones, trans. Samuel Moore (London: Penguin, 2002), 194.

⁵² Lenin, “Rech’ na torzhestvennom zasedanii Moskovskogo Soveta, posviashchennom godovshchine III Internatsionala,” 6 March 1920, in *PSS*, 40:206; Eric Hobsbawm, *Revolutionaries* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973), 62.

⁵³ James Joll, *The Second International, 1889–1914* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 56.

January 1918.¹¹⁰ “Many” anarchists became RKP(b) members, according to Gorelik.¹¹¹ Indeed, at least early on, “anarchists” and “Bolsheviks” often overlapped in local and provincial party organizations.¹¹²

Third, anarchists abroad were perhaps the most enthusiastic supporters of the October Revolution. The Bolsheviks were the heirs of the Communards and used “Anarchist revolutionary tactics,” argued Emma Goldman from the United States. Lenin and Lev Trotskii were more like Bakunin than like Marx.¹¹³ Spanish anarchists called themselves “Bolsheviks” and “communists,” created “red guards” and “soviet” newspapers, and deemed Lenin and Trotskii anarchists.¹¹⁴ “We looked [End Page 808] at Russia with lovers’ eyes,” remembered Armando Borghi, one of Italy’s foremost anarchists and the general secretary of the country’s syndicalist union.¹¹⁵

In the months after October, anarchists tried to catalyze a “third” revolution. Activists in Petrograd, Moscow, and elsewhere insisted on a genuine Commune and real workers’ control in industry, faulting the Bolsheviks for not going far

¹¹⁰ Paul Avrich, *Anarchist Portraits* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988), chap. 6; Service, *Lenin*, 337.

¹¹¹ Anatole Gorelik, “A proposito della intervista Sandominschi-Malatesta,” *L’Avvenire anarchico* (Pisa) 13, 22 (2 June 1922): 1.

¹¹² See, e.g., V. P. Suvorov, “Vospriatie pervoi mirovoi voiny rossiiskimi anarkhistami,” *Vestnik Tverskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta: Seriiia “Istoriia,”* no. 2 (2015): 58–71. Periodic reregistrations and purges testify to the “unreliable” quality and commitment of party members during the early stages of the revolution. See T. H. Rigby, *Communist Party Membership in the U.S.S.R., 1917–1967* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), chaps. 1–2.

¹¹³ Emma Goldman, *The Truth about the Bolsheviks* (New York: Mother Earth Publishing, [1918]), 4.

¹¹⁴ Manuel Buenacasa, *El movimiento obrero español 1886–1926* (Madrid: Ediciones Júcar, 1977), 50; Joseph Peirats, *Figuras del movimiento libertario español* (Barcelona: Ediciones Picazo, 1978), 189–90; Mercedes Arancibia, “La última entrevista con Gaston Leval,” *Tiempo de Historia* 4, 96 (1978): 13.

¹¹⁵ Armando Borghi, *Mezzo secolo di anarchia (1898–1945)* (Naples: Edizioni Scientifiche Italiane, 1989), 230.

Government *and* the Petrograd Soviet. They demanded an immediate peace, expropriation, and the creation of a “network of revolutionary self-governing *communes*.”¹⁰⁶ Appeals in Kharkiv/Khar’kov, Saratov, and Briansk insisted on the seizure of all property, an end to the war, and a new society oriented around well-being, science, and art.¹⁰⁷ Articles in *Vol’nyi Kronshtadt*’s first [End Page 807] issue of 2 October deemed another revolution “obvious and necessary” and mocked calls for the Constituent Assembly.¹⁰⁸

Second, rapprochement between numerous self-identified anarchists and Bolsheviks was genuine in 1917—and afterward. During the July Days, Iosif Bleikhman and Efim Iarchuk of the Petrograd Federation of Anarchists respectively made crucial appeals to Kronstadt sailors and to the First Machine Gun Regiment. Vladimir “Bill” Shatov, a Wobbly and member of the New York-based Soiuz russkikh rabochikh, participated alongside Iarchuk in the Petrograd Voенno-revoliutsionnyi komitet (VRK) and in the October Revolution, which Moscow’s anarchist federation celebrated as a rising against the “power of the bourgeoisie and the landlords.”¹⁰⁹ Anatolii Zhelezniakov, a Kronstadt minelayer who defended the Durnovo dacha squatters, dispersed the Constituent Assembly on Lenin’s orders in

¹⁰⁶ “Tseli i zadachi revoliutsii,” 10 (23) March 1917, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:21, 23.

¹⁰⁷ “Slovo k momenty,” [c. February/March 1917], in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:10–13; Saratovskaia svobodnaia assotsiatsiia anarkhistskikh grupp, “Ko vsem trudiashchimsia,” 29 August 1917, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:56–58; Izdanie gruppy rabochikh Brianskogo zavoda, “Chego dobivaiutsia anarkhisty-kommunisty,” 1917, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:23–25.

¹⁰⁸ “K zhelezno-dorozhnoi zabastovke,” *Vol’nyi Kronshtadt*, 2 October 1917, 1; N. Solntsev, “Uchreditel’noe sobranie,” *Vol’nyi Kronshtadt*, 2 October 1917, 2.

¹⁰⁹ “Manifest Moskovskoi federatsii anarkhicheskikh grupp,” 6 November 1917, in Kriven’kyi, *Anarkhisty*, 2:65. On these and other figures, see Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, esp. chaps. 5–6; and Harold Joel Goldberg, “The Anarchists View the Bolshevik Regime, 1918–1922” (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1973).

riation of social-democratic [End Page 799] hypocrisy and half measures.⁵⁴ “Until the October revolution and for some time afterwards,” Serge later reflected, “only the anarchists called themselves communists and declared themselves clearly hostile to state power. The official propagandists of socialism never mentioned the passages in Marx and Engels which dealt with the pernicious nature of the state and the need for it to disappear.” Only the anarchists, Serge wrote, opposed democracy and patriotism while advocating violent revolution, expropriation, and terrorism.⁵⁵ However exaggerated, Serge’s judgment captures the common perception at the time.

Debating Disorder

By raging against social democracy’s “sheer betrayal of socialism” from autumn 1914 onward, Lenin thus unintentionally placed himself alongside anarchists. Diatribes against “bourgeois reformism,” “class collaboration,” “bourgeois chauvinism,” “bourgeois parliamentarism and bourgeois legality” were hardly new to them.⁵⁶ Nor was Lenin’s view that the opportunism of social-democratic leaders was “no fortuity, no sin, no blunder, no treachery on the part of individuals,” but resulted from their organizations’ parasitic peace with capitalist development and bourgeois legality.⁵⁷ Nor was the “old Marxist name of communists,” which Lenin now reclaimed.⁵⁸ Nor was his insistence on inciting a revolution along the lines

⁵⁴ Victor Serge, *Memoirs of a Revolutionary*, trans. Peter Sedgwick with George Paizis (New York: New York Review of Books, 2012), 16, 39, 15.

⁵⁵ Victor Serge, “The Anarchists and the Experience of the Russian Revolution,” in Serge, *Revolution in Danger: Writings from Russia, 1919–1921*, trans. Ian Birchall (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 125.

⁵⁶ Lenin, “Zadachi revoliutsionnoi sotsial-demokratii v evropeiskoi voine,” written before 24 August (6 September) 1914, in *PSS*, 26:4.

⁵⁷ Lenin, “Krakh II Internatsionala,” September 1915 (written in second half of May/first half of June 1915), in *PSS*, 26:253.

⁵⁸ Lenin, “Odin nemetskii golos o voine,” 5 December 1914, in *PSS*, 26:95.

of the Commune at the earliest opportunity. “Half a century later, the conditions that weakened the revolution at that time have fallen away,” he wrote in the summer of 1915.⁵⁹ When *Sotsial-Demokrat* called on socialists to “raise the banner of civil war!” in November, Lenin presented the Commune as the “example” of the “conversion of a war of nations into a civil war.”⁶⁰ In Lenin’s reading, the Second International’s antiwar resolution passed at Basel in 1912—a vague, rhetorical warning that governments could not “unleash war without danger to themselves” (as proved by [End Page 800] the Commune, the Russian revolution of 1905, and strikes in armaments industries)⁶¹—now “threatened governments with ‘proletarian revolution’ precisely in connection with the coming war, when it referred to the Paris Commune.” A new revolt, relying on workers radicalized, armed, and organized by the war, would be a “thousand times more practicable, possible, and likely to succeed,” Lenin ventured in December 1916.⁶² *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* (which included the Basel manifesto as a supplement) breezily asserted that revolutionary expropriation and economic management (long deemed too complex or potentially catastrophic by moderate socialists) were now easier than ever thanks to wartime concentration and “finance capital.”

Lenin may have seen himself as a social democrat—but many social democrats did not. Just as SPD politicians Carl Legien and Eduard David charged Karl Liebknecht with

⁵⁹ Lenin, “Sotsializm i voina,” August 1915 (written July/August), in *PSS*, 26:325.

⁶⁰ Lenin, “Polozhenie i zadachi Sotsialisticheskogo Internatsionala,” 1 November 1914, in *PSS*, 26:41, 40.

⁶¹ *Außerordentlicher Internationaler Sozialisten-Kongreß zu Basel am 24. und 25. November 1912* (Berlin: Paul Singer, 1912), 26.

⁶² Lenin, “Chernovoi proekt tezisov obrashcheniia k Internatsional’noi sotsialisticheskoi komissii i ko vsem sotsialisticheskim partiiam,” written before 25 December 1916 (7 January) 1917, in *PSS*, 30:279, 280.

Palace “fell into the hands of [End Page 806] the anarchists,” referred to “the dictatorship of the Soviet, that is of revolutionary or anarchist socialism,” and simply glossed the government as “the anarchist movement.”¹⁰² Voices across the Russian political spectrum accused the Bolsheviks of fomenting anarchy and civil war. Gor’kii disparaged Lenin’s “Nechaevist-Bakuninist anarchism” and “conspirators and anarchists of the Nechaevist type”; R. M. Plekhanova described the Bolsheviks as “Herbétists, Bakuninists, anarchists,” who were “letting great Russia be torn into pieces.”¹⁰³ In December, the foreign press referred to “the anarchist government of Lenin and Co.,” the “radical, and even radical-anarchist, suppression of all kinds of leaders,” plans to fund foreign agents to spread “anarchist propaganda,” and “the usurping Bolshevik or Anarchist Government.”¹⁰⁴ Gor’kii highlighted how the Bolsheviks promoted “animalistic anarchism,” “the miserable ideas of Proudhon,” and “anarcho-syndicalist ideas.”¹⁰⁵

Such accusations made some sense. First, just as European anarchists had elaborated arguments that sounded like Lenin’s, Russian anarchists in 1917 seemed not just to share but to anticipate many Bolshevik slogans and objectives. Already in March, Lausanne exiles advocated a “communist revolution” and a “Social Revolution” to depose the Provisional

¹⁰² “Le triomphe de Lénine,” *L’Intransigeant*, 9 November 1917, 1; Louis Coudurier, “Kerensky en fuite...,” *La Dépêche de Brest*, 10 November 1917, 1; “Une dictature cosaque (?),” *La Liberté*, 12 November 1917, 1.

¹⁰³ Gor’kii, “K demokratii,” *Novaia zhizn’*, 7 (20) November 1917, 1; R. M. Plekhanova to her daughters, 28 November 1917, in Samuel H. Baron, *Plekhanov in Russian History and Soviet Historiography* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1995), 186–87.

¹⁰⁴ “L’Anarchie russe,” *Paris-Midi*, 18 December 1917, 1 (italics removed); “Le train ‘bochewisky;’” *Le XIXe siècle*, 21 December 1917, 1; Saint-Brice, “La réponse allemande n’est pas encore prête,” *Le Journal* (Paris), 27 December 1917, 1; “Tanalyk Corporation (Limited),” *The Times*, 15 December 1917, 13.

¹⁰⁵ M. Gor’kii, “Nesvoevremennyya mysli,” *Novaia zhizn’*, 6 (19) December 1917, 1, and 23 December 1917/5 January 1918, 1.

Left,” “Bolshevism,” “whatever it may be called,” to “Russian Democracy, imbued with the spirit of love for the State and for the ideals of freedom.”⁹⁸

Anarchy in Power

In this context, anarchy, anarchism, and a Bolshevik-led government were not necessarily seen as contradictory. Issuing “anarchist propaganda” despite “his frequent references to Karl Marx,” Lenin aspired to cataclysmic chaos, argued *Les Temps*’s Petrograd correspondent in July, “in which order will be reestablished by the guillotine!”⁹⁹ For the Bolsheviks, “governing” simply meant crime, terror, and disorder, argued a French jurist and official in August. “Of course, they object that criminals are not their friends, and they scornfully call them anarchists, as if they themselves weren’t the worst anarchists in the world. What Lenin and his acolytes would like us to believe, is that alongside the regular (!) government of Soviets, an anarchist government (what a peculiar combination of words!) is attempting to establish itself and is constantly aiming to seize power.”¹⁰⁰ In September, *Rech’* ventured that the Bolsheviks, “anarchists in method and in practice,” be allowed to take power, so that they would fail.¹⁰¹

Many qualified the regime established in October using similar language. French papers claimed that the Winter

⁹⁸ Quoted in Sack, *Birth*, 441. Kerenskii later referred to that summer’s struggles against “anarcho-Bolshevik antistatist elements” and of “statists [gosudarstvenniki] with anarchy” (A. F. Kerenskii, *Delo Kornilova* [Moscow: Zadruga, 1918], 76).

⁹⁹ Ludovic Naudeau, “Les évènements de Russie,” *Les Temps*, 15 July 1917, 2.

¹⁰⁰ Ernest Lémonon, “La politique extérieure,” *Revue politique et parlementaire* (Paris), 10 August 1918, 188.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Lenin, “Uderzhat li bol’sheviki gosudarstvennuiu vlast’?” October 1917, in *PSS*, 34:291, quoting *Rech’*, 16 (29) September 1917, 2.

“anarchism,”⁶³ the Bolsheviks were accused of “anarchism” by the Menshevik “liquidator” G. D. Kuchin and of “‘madness,’ ‘dreams,’ ‘adventurism,’ ‘Bakuninism’—as David, Plekhanov, Aksel’rod, Kautsky and others have asserted,” as Lenin documented.⁶⁴ “At that time it seemed monstrous,” recalled Grigorii Zinov’ev in September 1918 of *Sotsial-Demokrat*’s endorsement of civil war. “We were told that only an anarchist could preach such things, and virtually war was declared upon us.” Swiss socialists “would declare that Lenin was corrupting the entire working class movement by his Russian ‘anarchism.’”⁶⁵ In response to these attacks, Lenin stressed that clandestine activism and preparation for revolt were not anarchism.⁶⁶ “It is impossible to recognize the revolutionary struggle of the masses and to reconcile oneself to the exclusively legal activity of socialists in parliament. This leads only to the legitimate dissatisfaction of the workers and their departure from [End Page 801] social democracy for antiparliamentary anarchism or syndicalism.”⁶⁷ But the distinctions he drew were lost on many. In late 1916, Lenin corrected Nikolai Bukharin, who believed that both socialists and anarchists “want[ed] to ‘abolish’ the state, to ‘blow it up’ (*sprengen*).” In fact, socialists wanted to use the “modern state and its institutions,” as well as a special “transitional form, *also* a state, [which] is the dictatorship of the proletariat.” This state would “wither

⁶³ Lenin, “Krakh,” in *PSS*, 26:257–58.

⁶⁴ Lenin, “Prikritye sotsial-shovinistskoi politiki internatsionalistskimi frazami,” 21 December 1915, in *PSS*, 27:86; Lenin, “Opportunizm i krakh II Internatsionala,” January 1916, in *PSS*, 27:127.

⁶⁵ G. [E.] Zinov’ev [Zinov’ev], *N. Lenin: His Life and Work* (London: British Socialist Party, [1919]), 35, 37.

⁶⁶ See, e.g., Lenin, “O zadachakh oppozitsii vo Frantsii (Pis’mo k tovarishchu Safarovu),” 10 February 1916, in *PSS*, 27:235–39.

⁶⁷ Lenin, “Predlozhenie Tsentral’nogo komiteta RSDRP vtoroi sotsialisticheskoi konferentsii,” 22 April 1916 (written at the end of February/March), in *PSS*, 27:291.

away,' gradually 'fall asleep' *after* the expropriation of the bourgeoisie."⁶⁸

On the eve of the February Revolution, Lenin was busy clarifying "the attitude of Marxism toward the state" and a critique of Kautsky as well as Bukharin (mistaken, but "much better than Kautsky"). Though the issue was "archival," it preoccupied him.⁶⁹ On 4 March, he requested a copy of Bakunin's *The Paris Commune and the Idea of the State*.⁷⁰ Upon hearing the news from Russia, he hurried to explain how Bolsheviks should relate to several states and governments. His telegram of 6 March urged departing Bolsheviks to oppose the Provisional Government and withhold support from other parties.⁷¹ In his unpublished "Letters from Afar," he mocked *The Times* of London's warnings about "the dread ordeal of the Commune and the anarchy of civil war," for "it is precisely the capitalists who introduce anarchy and war into human society."⁷² Again he differentiated Marxists from anarchists. "We are *for* the revolutionary use of the revolutionary forms of the state for the struggle for socialism, while the anarchists are *against*." Per "the lessons of the Paris Commune and the analysis of these lessons by Marx and Engels," which had been "distorted or forgotten" by the "opportunists and the Kautskyites," Marxists "must '*smash*,' to use Marx's words, this 'ready-made' state machine and replace

⁶⁸ Lenin, "Internatsional molodezhi (Zametka)," December 1916, in *PSS*, 30:228. See Lenin to N. I. Bukharin, end of August/beginning of September 1916, in *PSS*, 49:293–94; Lenin to Bukharin, 14 October 1916, in *PSS*, 49:306–10.

⁶⁹ Lenin to A. M. Kollontai, 17 February 1917, in *PSS*, 49:388. See Lenin to I. F. Armand, 19 February 1917, in *PSS*, 49:390–91.

⁷⁰ Lenin to S. N. Ravich, 4 March 1917, in *PSS*, 49:393.

⁷¹ Lenin, "Telegramma bol'shevikam, ot'ezhchayushchim v Rossiiu," 6 (19) March 1917, in *PSS*, 31:7.

⁷² "History of the Movement," *The Times*, 16 March 1917, 8; Lenin, "Pis'ma iz daleka (Novoe pravitel'stvo i proletariat)," 9 (22) March 1917, in *PSS*, 31:26.

day.⁹² Bolsheviks were commonly cast as anarchists and as generic agents of disorder—and vice versa. In the foreign press, Lenin became an "anarchist" and elaborated "anarchist arguments"; *Pravda* became "a revolutionary anarchist organ."⁹³

Lenin rebutted "slander" and flung back charges of "anarchism" in April and May.⁹⁴ "When the Bolsheviks, the ill-starred Bolsheviks, said: 'no support for, no confidence in this government,' how many accusations of 'anarchism' fell thick and fast upon us at that time!," he observed during the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies on 4 [End Page 805] June.⁹⁵ A. F. Kerenskii nonetheless urged attendees to support the Provisional Government against "the anarchy from the Left."⁹⁶ After the July Days, deemed "anarchistic demonstrations" by the Petrograd Soviet Executive Committee, "the anarchist counter-revolution" by *Le Petit Parisien*, and an "anarchist creation" by a Petrograd anarchist, the foreign press again painted Lenin and his party as anarchist.⁹⁷ At the National Conference in Moscow on 2 August, Kerenskii counterposed "the anarchy of the

⁹² M[aaksim] Gor'kii, "Nesvoevremennyya mysli," *Novaia zhizn'*, 18 (31) May 1917, 1.

⁹³ "Assail Lenine as German Agent," *New York Times*, 28 April 1917, 1; "Les événements de Russie," *Les Temps*, 28 April 1917, 2; "En Russie," *La Liberté: Journal de Paris, indépendant, politique, littéraire et financier*, 7 May 1917, 1.

⁹⁴ Lenin, "Chestnyi golos v khore klevetnikov," 15 April 1917, in *PSS*, 31:235–36; Lenin, "Znachenie bratan'ia," 28 April 1917, in *PSS*, 31:459–61; Lenin, "Rech' po agrarnomu voprosu," 22 May (4 June) 1917, in *PSS*, 32:171.

⁹⁵ Lenin, "Rech' ob otnoshenii k vremennomu pravitel'stvo," 4 (17) June 1917, in *PSS*, 32:265.

⁹⁶ Quoted in Sack, *Birth*, 415.

⁹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 429; "Contre l'anarchie russe," *Le Petit Parisien*, 22 July 1917, 1; quoted in Avrich, *Russian Anarchists*, 135. See also *Les Temps*, 30 July 1917, 2; *New York Times*, 31 July 1917, 3; *Les temps*, 30 August 1917, 2; *Bulletin périodique de la presse russe*, no. 50 (15 August 1917), 1; and *La Nation* (Geneva), 4 August 1917, 1.

“dictatorship.” They remained weak, unconscious, and in thrall to petit-bourgeois representatives and to the Provisional Government.⁸⁷ But he ridiculed worries that “we’ll be mixed up with the anarchist-communists” and lambasted [End Page 804] those who whipped up fears of “anarchy.”⁸⁸ Again and again he mocked Plekhanov, Kautsky, and moderate socialists for distorting Marxism and the Commune. To demand land occupations, bank seizures, and soviet rule was hardly a call for anarchy. “Anarchy is the negation of any state power,” Lenin asserted, “whereas the Soviet of Workers’ and Soldiers’ Deputies is also a state power.”⁸⁹

Convincing non-Bolshevik publics was a challenge. The confluence of imperial collapse, far-left mobilization, and popular unrest intensified the long-standing conflation of the negative term “anarchy” (chaos, insurrection, expropriation) with the positive content of “anarchism” (a stateless society). Foreign papers mentioned “anarchist propaganda” (*The Times*), “anarchist elements” (*Les Temps* of Paris), and generic “anarchy” (*The New York Times*).⁹⁰ *Rech’* published an “Anarchy” column which listed instances of lawlessness—phenomena that took place “under the protection of anarchism,” argued V. A. Maklakov in the Duma session of 17 May.⁹¹ “Anarchy, anarchy!’ cry the ‘sensible’ people, intensifying and spreading panic,” complained Maksim Gor’kii in *Novaia zhizn’* the next

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Lenin, “Zadachi proletariata v nashei revoliutsii,” September 1917 (written 10 [23] April 1917), in *PSS*, 31:182; Lenin, “Soiuz lzhi,” 14 April 1917, in *PSS*, 31:217–20.

⁸⁹ Lenin, “Politicheskie partii v Rossii i zadachi proletariata,” 23, 26, and 27 April (6, 9, and 10 May) 1917 (written early April), in *PSS*, 31:196 n.

⁹⁰ [Robert Wilton], “Difficulties of Duma Committee,” *The Times*, 19 March 1917, 9; General Malletterre, “Stratégie de famine,” *Les Temps*, 15 April 1917, 3; “Anarchy Spreads through Russia,” *New York Times*, 26 May 1917, 3.

⁹¹ Quoted in A. J. Sack, *The Birth of the Russian Democracy* (New York: Russian Information Bureau, 1918), 338.

it with a new one, *merging* the police, army, and bureaucracy with *the universally-armed people*.⁷³

This process was unfinished. Having stated that the workers “have smashed [*razbili*]” the “old state machine,” Lenin corrected himself. “More [End Page 802] accurately, they have *begun* to smash [*nachali razbivat*] it.”⁷⁴ The first (and sole published) “Letter from Afar” deemed the Basel manifesto vindicated but described the Petrograd Soviet ambiguously: “the chief, unofficial, as yet undeveloped, relatively weak *workers’ government*.”⁷⁵ In his speech at the Zurich People’s House on 27 March, Lenin capaciously identified the “state that *we need*” with the Commune, the soviets of 1905 and 1917, and the “*armed and organized workers*.”⁷⁶ Speaking to Petrograd Bolsheviks at the Kshesinskaia Palace on 3 April, he asserted that the soviets were the “real government,” yet “a government never before seen in the world, except for the Commune.... The dictatorship of the proletariat is there, but people don’t know what to do with it.”⁷⁷

This analysis, as presented on 4 April at the Tauride Palace, perplexed many Social Democrats. The correspondent of Plekhanov’s *Edinstvo* referred to a “truly insane speech” and “anarchist demagoguery” that provoked an “indisputable sensation.”⁷⁸ In the following days, the paper reflected on Lenin’s errors, printed protests by Petrograd workers, and

⁷³ Lenin, “Pis’ma iz daleka (O proletarskoi militsii),” 11 (24) March 1917, in *PSS*, 31:39, 40.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 31:40.

⁷⁵ Lenin, “Pis’ma iz daleka (Pervyi etap pervoi revoliutsii),” written 7 (20) March 1917, in *PSS*, 31:18.

⁷⁶ Lenin, “O zadachakh RSDRP v russkoi revoliutsii,” written 16 or 17 (29 or 30) March 1917, in *PSS* 31:76 (my translation from the German).

⁷⁷ Lenin, “Doklad na sobranii bol’shevikov—uchastnikov Vserossiiskogo soveshchaniia sovetov rabochikh i soldatskikh deputatov,” 4 (17) April 1917, in *PSS*, 31:108, 110.

⁷⁸ “Soveshchanie predstavitelei s.-d. partii po voprosu ob ob’edinenii,” *Edinstvo* (Petrograd), no. 5 (5 April 1917), 4.

critiqued the “anarcho-Kshesinkists [*anarkho-kshesintsy*].”⁷⁹ *Rech´* noted a mixed reaction to Lenin’s initial remarks, then a “sepulchral silence and plain bewilderment among the vast majority of the attendees” after he concluded.⁸⁰ “An ideological vacuum formed around Lenin—no one agrees with him, everyone disavows him,” claimed *Russkaia volia*. “Not even wanting to call himself a social democrat, and having renamed himself a communist,” Lenin pledged the “struggle of all against all.”⁸¹ The “Theses” were “entirely abstracted from conditions of time and place” and betrayed Lenin’s “astounding and purely anarchist formula of progress,” Plekhanov insisted.⁸² Lenin’s attack on the Petrograd Soviet as “opportunists who have yielded to the influence of the bourgeoisie and are carrying its influence to [End Page 803] the proletariat” was “anarchist language,” analogous to Bakunin’s assault on Marx in *Statism and Anarchy* (1873). The caveat that socialism would not be introduced immediately in Russia was

only a weak attempt by our “communist” to reassure his Marxist conscience. In fact he breaks completely with all of those preconditions of socialist politics based on the theory of Marx and, with his entire convoy and artillery, goes over to the camp of the anarchists, who have always tirelessly called on the workers of all countries to carry out the socialist revolution, never inquiring about exactly

⁷⁹ “Ruki proch!,” *Edinstvo*, no. 15 (16 April 1917), 1. See generally nos. 13–15.

⁸⁰ “Konferentsii s.-d. partii,” *Rech´* (Petrograd), no. 78 (5 April 1917), 6.

⁸¹ “Plekhanov i Lenin,” *Russkaia volia* (Petrograd), no. 48 (6 April 1917), 2.

⁸² G. Plekhanov, “O tezisakh Lenina i o tom, pochemu bred byvaet podchas ves´ma interesen,” *Edinstvo*, no. 9 (9 April 1917), 1; G. Plekhanov, “O tezisakh Lenina...,” *Edinstvo*, no. 10 (11 April 1917), 2.

which phase of economic development this or that country is experiencing.⁸³

Lenin painstakingly corrected misinterpretations. Already on the night of 3 April, as he rested in the Kshesinskaia Palace before speaking to local activists, he overheard “one extremely nervous, almost hysterical comrade” who was “calling for an immediate uprising and jabbering with endless anarchist phrases, which had no real substance,” according to V. D. Bonch-Bruевич’s memoirs. Lenin wryly asked whether the orator was a Bolshevik. “No, that’s impossible,” Vladimir Il’ich said, ‘he must be stopped at once.... This is some sort of leftist nonsense,’ he concluded suddenly.” Lenin told the orator to look for another job. “But this is the real Bolshevism,” protested the orator, who was prevented from speaking again.⁸⁴ On 7 April, as Lenin laid out the “Theses” in *Pravda*, he objected to *Edinstvo*’s coverage. “Isn’t it easier, of course, to shout, curse, and howl than to try to relate, to explain, to recall *how* Marx and Engels discussed the experience of the Paris Commune in 1871, 1872, 1875 and *what* sort of state the proletariat needs?”⁸⁵ “Ignorant persons and renegades of Marxism, like Mr. Plekhanov and so forth, can shout about anarchism, Blanquism, and so forth,” Lenin wrote in the *Letters on Tactics*, but he advocated a transitional state of armed workers, “in accordance with Marx and the experience of the Paris Commune.”⁸⁶

Lenin acknowledged that the soviets only *partly* existed as a working-class polity, as a “commune state,” as an extra-legal

⁸³ G. Plekhanov, “O tezisakh Lenina...,” *Edinstvo*, no. 11 (12 April 1917), 2.

⁸⁴ V. D. Bonch-Bruевич, *Izbrannye sochineniia*, 3 vols. (Moscow: Izdatel’stvo Akademii nauk SSSR, 1959–63), 3:29.

⁸⁵ Lenin, “O zadachakh proletariata v dannoi revoliutsii,” 7 April 1917, in *PSS*, 31:117–18.

⁸⁶ Lenin, “Pis´ma o taktike,” written between 8 (21) and 13 (26) April 1917, in *PSS*, 31:138.